

## Part II Chapter 34 De Profundis

Tom was trying his luck working at the docks, since the depression seemed to be easing. He and Brian waited to cart merchandise from South Street, where it had been unloaded from ships' holds, across the cobbled streets to warehouses where clerks winched it up via hemp cables over hoisting wheels. Waiting for a cargo, they had time to observe passengers disembarking. Immigrants from Ireland still arrived monthly through the winter. Tom recognized the look on the faces of new arrivals stranded on the wharves, and pointed out to Brian the "runners" speaking in Gaelic, approaching them and promising to 'help' their fellow countrymen. He recognized the frightened look in their eyes, and watched as they naively followed the runner, as he and Bridget had, to a boarding house operated by a friend.

"They'll be promised good meals and comfortable rooms, at very affordable rates, including free storage of any luggage. They'll be surprised to find that they're in some filthy hole in the Sixth Ward, a hovel occupied by eight or ten others, paying prices three or four times higher than they've been told. Their luggage will be confiscated for back-rent as soon as their money runs out, and they'll be tossed out, homeless and penniless." He told him the story of how Mrs. Malloy had taken Bridget's tablecloth and held it as ransom and forced Bridget to go to work for Mrs. Malloy. Brian said he was thankful he'd been spared that by the Tammany gang rounding him up for the work camp and by meeting Tom.

While Bridget was nursing baby James and feeding the twins one evening before dinner, Lena could wait no longer. Something had been bothering her ever since they visited the Dalys. "Mama, when I asked you for a book of maps of my own, you told me Irish are too poor to own books. Will's father is Irish but he has a room full of books and atlases."

"Not now, Lena. It's a long story. Maybe after I've put the children to bed and we've eaten dinner, your father and I can tell you—and Will and Dan-- the difference between Willie's father and our Da," she added. "It'll be a story. You like stories, don't you?"

So after dinner, Bridget and Tom and Brian sat at the table surrounded by the three children, though Dan was already nodding off.

"Long ago in Ireland--when there were chieftains or heads of clans—and the O Shaughnessys and the O'Haras were in clans--all Irish were Catholics.

"Are we Catholics?" Will asked.

“Ninny,” Lena said. “You know you’re a Catholic. Weren’t you baptized? Don’t you pay attention in Sunday School?”

“Tell us the story, Mama. Don’t let Will distract you.” Lena resented that Will was always diverting attention to himself.

“Ireland was known as the land of saints and scholars,” Tom proclaimed, taking out his pipe, eager to tell a story from his happy memories back in school in Jarlath, when Father Scanlon had treated them to songs about their glorious past.

“But then the English came and took all the best land,” Brian added. He hadn’t heard about the saints and scholars, only about the penal times.

“Was the land in Ireland that much better than in England?” Lena asked.

“I guess free made it better,” Brian answered. “Free to the Protestants. . .”

“Who are Protestants?” Will asked.

“Those who take away your land; starve you, keep you from getting good jobs, and are always wanting to pick a fight--- .”

“Oh, dear, this is going nowhere. Will, you’re too young to be thinking about such things. Lena, ask your history teacher. I’m sure she can tell you better than we can.” Story hour was over.

Lena wouldn’t let the matter go, approaching her teacher the next day with the question, “Sister, how come some Irish fathers don’t do labor?” Lena didn’t want to come out and tell her teacher that while Mr. Daly was sitting snug in his library her father was out in all weather driving a cart, although she might have been surprised to learn that other girls’ fathers did equally humble work.

“We’re not ready to go into all that yet, Lena. We’ll need to finish learning about the Romans persecuting the Christians, before we get to the Protestants persecuting the Catholics.” Lena couldn’t wait, so she ran over to nearby St. Mary’s Academy, where Nell was studying.

“How come your da and my ma work for Mr. Daly who also came from Ireland. Isn’t everyone from Ireland poor?”

“Not all Irish are poor. My da’s not poor—nor as rich as Mr. Daly. My da has tailoring, which Mr. Daly needs; your mama does fancy sewing, which Mrs. Daly needs. Your da has nothing to sell but his labor; that’s why he’s poor. Mr. Daly

is a judge. All judges are rich.”

Lena didn't like what Nell said about her da having nothing to sell. “My da works harder than anybody. He leaves before I'm awake and doesn't come home till after dark.”

“It's probably because of the Orangemen over here not liking him. My da told me that the Orangemen came and took away all the best lands and settled all the Orangemen on them.”

“Who are the Orangemen?”

“Protestants.”

“Is Mr. Daly an Orangeman?”

“He must be.”

It was in this roundabout way that Lena figured out that there were Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics, and the Orangemen, as everyone seemed to call the Protestants, were definitely doing better than the Catholics.

Bridget addressed Lena's curiosity one evening when they were bathing the twins. “Willie's father was poor when he came to America, Lena, but because he was Protestant, he had opportunities that your father didn't have. He is a smart man and went to law school. Your father was educated in Ireland—to be a priest. You didn't know that. He was nineteen when he changed his mind—after he met me. Things will be different for you now that we're here. You have a chance to be something other a seamstress or a laborer. I hope you appreciate your opportunity.”

Will reacted in a different way. He saw an opportunity and took advantage of it immediately. “I'm a Catholic,” he boasted after school, hoping some Protestant classmate would pick a fight with him.

“So? Who cares?” said one of the boys, “So am I.” Will didn't know that when he had begun school in 1842, thanks to Bishop Hughes fight with the state-supported Public School Society with its Quaker and Protestant bias, the Society had been abolished and the public schools were now in the hands of the wards, and as his school was in the mostly Irish Sixth Ward, most of the students were indeed Catholics like himself.

The winter of 1843-'44 was a hard one for Tom and his family. They were indeed poor—more immigrants meant more competition and less work, and less money

and less food. Although Bridget had sent \$10 whenever she could save up, no family members arrived. “A good thing, too, for we’re barely able to look after ourselves.”

Christmas time that year, everyone missed Mike, for he had enjoyed dressing up and coming as St. Nicholas to surprise the children. “What happened to St. Nick?” Dan asked the next morning, when they realized that the night had gone by and no one had awakened them to give them presents.

There were no toys this year. “At least Will didn’t get any coal,” Lena laughed. Bridget had made a new dress for the twins’ doll, and new clothes to replace ones they’d outgrown.

After Mass that Christmas morning, while Tom waited in the vestibule talking to friends, Bridget carried led the children up to the altar to present baby James to the priest for his blessing, then led them to see the crib.

“See how poor Jesus was,” she began, pointing to the doll in the straw. “He was so poor he was born in an manger among animals.”

“Where’s the horses?” Will asked. “Just some old sheep and a cow.” He turned away, but Daniel was fascinated.

“He was poorer than anyone,” Bridget said. “Too poor even for horses.”

“Because he was a Catholic?” Lena was trying to understand economics of her world. .

“He was poor first. But being poor didn’t make him unhappy. He was happy because he knew his Mama and Papa loved him. He wanted to make them happy so he helped his mother in the kitchen and his father in the wood shed--as Lena helps me,” she added, to apply her sermonette.

Daniel looked anxious. “I help you too, Mama, don’t I?”

“Indeed you do. And you will help Papa to, Danny, for you’re a very good boy.”

Having received such high praise, Dan hoped to advance further. “Am I a Chieftain?” Will had not yet approved him.

“You certainly are. You’re all chieftains—the O Shaughnessy clan.”

Will wandered back into the conversation, “Was Jesus a chieftain? Was he in our clan?”

“No, silly,” Lena answered. “He wasn’t born in Ireland. Chieftains are Irish.” She knew from the map at school that the Holy Land where Jesus was born was nowhere near Ireland, “but he was a Catholic, wasn’t he?” She still wasn’t sure after her mother’s evasive answer.

Winter was hard on the family, but it was harder on Dolly, Tom realized. Some days she seemed so listless that he couldn’t bear to harness her to a loaded cart and ask her to pull it along treacherous cobblestones, so he left her in the shed and took Brian with him behind Jack. Even the sturdy Jack found the going hard that winter.

During Lent Dolly grew more lethargic, and Tom had to leave her home more and more. She could barely lift her head to greet him. She wasn’t eating. Every evening he was impatient to return to her side to urge her to eat and drink. One evening they found her lying on her side. She seemed barely to recognize the two men as they led Jack into the shed. The two men knelt beside her. Brian shook his head. “She’ll not make it through the night.”



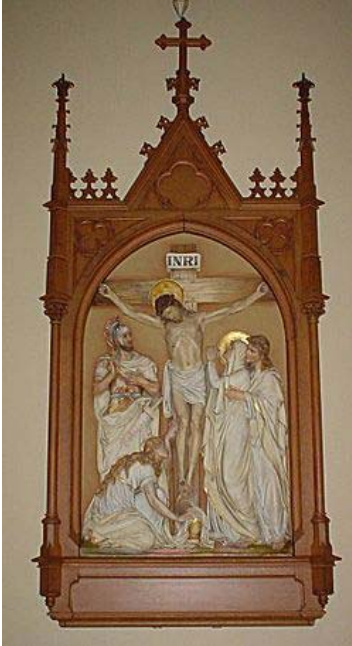
It was Holy Thursday evening, and the men were going to the Holy Thursday service at church. There was a new young assistant who had a lively imagination and a theatrical sense and wanted to dramatize the liturgy of the Last Supper. He had asked Brian and Tom to be apostles and get their feet washed by him, in the role of Jesus. Tom didn’t want to leave Dolly, but Bridget told him he must go and

represent his patron saint, Thomas. He laid a blanket on Dolly before he left and told her he would pray for her.

It was the morning of Good Friday, and when Tom went to the shed to check on Dolly, he found only her cold body. “I should have stayed with her,” he told Bridget. The children all wanted to see her, so he led them out to the shed. Dan burst out in tears. “Poor Dolly,” Lena said. Even Will looked at a loss. For as long as any of them could remember, Dolly had been their horse, almost a member of the family.

As they entered the darkened church that afternoon for the Stations of the Cross, the children all began to cry again. All the crosses and statues were shrouded in deep purple—everyone was mourning Dolly’s passing with them,

Tom joined in chanting the *De Profundis*.



De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine:  
Domine, exaudi vocem meam:  
Fiant aures tuae intendentes,  
in vocem deprecationis meae.  
Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine:  
Domine, quis sustinebit?  
Quia apud te propitiatio est:  
et propter legem tuam sustinui te, Domine.  
Sustinuit anima mea in verbo eius:  
speravit anima mea in Domino.  
A custodia matutina usque ad noctem:  
speret Israel in Domino.  
Quia apud Dominum misericordia:  
et copiosa apud eum redemptio.  
Et ipse redimet Israel,  
ex omnibus iniquitatibus eius.  
Gloria Patri, et Filio,  
et Spiritui Sancto.  
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper,  
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

He knew the meaning of the Latin—

*Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice.  
Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.  
If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities: Lord, who shall stand it?  
For with Thee there is merciful forgiveness: and by reason of thy law, I have  
waited for Thee, O Lord.  
My soul hath relied on His word, my soul hath hoped in the Lord.  
From the morning watch even until night, let Israel hope in the Lord.  
Because with the Lord there is mercy: and with him plentiful redemption.  
And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

Dolly had left him—his best friend. As he lined up with his family to venerate the cross, he felt unutterably sad, abandoned. Dolly was gone. Michael was gone. He alone was left in New York, with an ever growing family to support.

His life was not as he had expected it to be. He had relied on—who? His own good fortune? All his luck had deserted him. God? God had surely forgotten him. Like the psalmist, day after day he waited for deliverance-- for work; for the Lord to show mercy, yet no help came. He felt utterly forsaken. He too was deserted by his friends, even by God, his father.

Lena, seeing her father weeping, began weeping to herself.